

VZCZCXYZ0015  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHHE #0352/01 1341406  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 141406Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3348  
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 000352

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/17/2007  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [EUN](#) [FI](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT BREAKS WITH THE PAST

Classified By: polchief Greg Thome, reasons 1.5 (b) (d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During their first meeting, new Speaker of Parliament Niinisto and the Ambassador discussed NATO issues and the EU's approach to Russia. The Speaker spoke warmly both of the new tone in Finnish-US relations and of the "more open dialogue on NATO" his party intends to lead now that it is in government. The Ambassador urged greater funding for peacekeeping operations, and asked that Parliament ratify two bilateral legal assistance treaties. The meeting made clear that Parliament's leader fully shares the GOF's goal of improving both the tone and the substance of the US-Finnish relationship. END SUMMARY.

Niinisto: A New Tone, A New NATO Dialogue

¶2. (SBU) On May 11, Ambassador Ware made her first call on Sauli Niinisto in his capacity as new Speaker of Parliament. Niinisto opened by assuring the Ambassador that both the new GOF and the new Parliament intended to improve the tone and the substance of the bilateral relationship. The most visible changes will come in the areas of foreign and security policy and foreign policy. "We are saying goodbye to the shadows of the 1960s," he said, and from the US point of view this should mean more transparency on issues of importance to Washington.

¶3. (SBU) Niinisto said that Finland was eager to establish a better relationship with the US and a "more open dialogue on NATO." Previously, Finnish journalists and politicians attacked those who favored Finland's joining NATO, using support for NATO membership as a political weapon, he said. Now, however, "that weapon no longer works." As for the bilateral relationship, Parliament intends to match the improved tone and substance that Government has called for with the US. The Speaker noted with pleasure that Parliament's American Friendship Caucus had already re-emerged, and he thanked Poloffs for briefing its members May 11. He also specifically asked for more congressional delegations to Finland; more informal trips to the US such as the Pennsylvania trip the Embassy organized last year for the Finnish Foreign Affairs Committee; and frequent discussions with the Embassy to include a regular Speaker-Ambassador meeting.

Bilateral Treaties and More PKO Funds

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador welcomed Niinisto's enthusiasm for revitalizing the bilateral relationship and suggested two concrete steps Parliament could take at this early stage. First, she urged ratification of a bilateral extradition treaty and a mutual legal assistance treaty (MLAT), both of which have awaited Parliamentary action since 2005. Niinisto assured her he would look in to both. Second, she reminded the Speaker of the great value the US places on Finnish contributions to NATO and other international crisis management operations, and urged even greater

participation. Niinisto responded by noting that Parliament's was not the only voice that influenced budgetary priorities, but he expressed his pride in the work and reputation of Finnish peacekeepers and said he would do what he could to strengthen their efforts worldwide.

#### The Russia Challenge

15. (SBU) Turning to shared regional challenges, Niinisto said that the EU's strategic partnership is extremely important but that, unfortunately, it has reached a difficult impasse. He agreed with the Ambassador that Moscow appears engaged in a rising trend of unsettling behavior. However, Niinisto also noted that the EU's dependence on Russian energy and its inability to formulate a unified energy policy to protect its own interests exacerbate the problem. Niinisto and the Ambassador also agreed that in addition to Russia, the US and EU needed to work together to address challenges in China and India -- again especially in the area of energy.

#### Comment

16. (C) The Ambassador's first meeting with Niinisto in his capacity as Speaker made clear that Parliament fully shares the GOF's goal of improving both the tone and the substance of the US-Finnish relationship. In particular, his "shadows of the 1960s" comment was a clear attempt to distance himself and the new government from President Halonen, former FM Erkki Tuomioja and others on the left wing of the Social Democratic Party, which dominated Finnish politics for the past 4 years. Halonen and Tuomioja are products of the European anti-Americanism that accompanied the Vietnam War, and many Finns -- including Niinisto -- have criticized them for being unable to move beyond their "student activism" days and for allowing their unreconstructed anti-US radicalism to influence unduly their foreign policy decisions today. END COMMENT.

WARE